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SUBJECT: PM INGRAHAM OUTLINES ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PRIORITIES

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- [1](#)B. NASSAU 69
- [1](#)C. NASSAU 160
- [1](#)D. NASSAU 71
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SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Prime Minister Ingraham recently delivered an upbeat assessment of his government's accomplishments in 2007 against the background of negative economic conditions in the wider world and worries over crime and economic uncertainty at home. Ingraham put a brave face on "a difficult year" in 2007 by pointing to his government's investments in defense, law enforcement, and border security. He identified fighting crime, providing adequate social services, and revamping the tourism product among his priorities for 2008. Subsequent government initiatives to support and train police, defense, and border security agencies underlined the high priority his government attaches to fighting illegal immigration and narcotics-trafficking. His diagnosis of current national ills was wide-ranging, and his remarks were characteristically specific and pragmatic. A staunch U.S. ally, Ingraham will continue to welcome practical U.S. support to deal with competing priorities amidst societal anxiety about acute domestic policy concerns, especially spiraling crime. END SUMMARY.

PM POINTS TO SUCCESSES

[1](#)2. (SBU) In his first major assessment of his government's progress since taking office in May 2007, Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham delivered an optimistic assessment January 13 of his Free National Movement (FNM) government's accomplishments in 2007 -- a year punctuated by economic slowdown, rising crime, and long-term social and infrastructure challenges. Ingraham cited the purchases and deployment (some completed, more planned) of aircraft and ships (including four from the U.S. under the Enduring Friendship Program) for the Royal Bahamas Defense Force as a significant accomplishment. He also noted increased outlays for law enforcement, the introduction of e-passports and machine-readable visas with biometric features, the launch of electronic cruise ship passenger clearances, increased attention to airport safety and security measures, and improvements to criminal justice legislation in his laundry list of successes. These vessels and airplanes will improve ongoing drug and migrant detection and interdiction efforts, a pillar of U.S.-Bahamian cooperation for decades through OPBAT.

RECOGNIZES GLOBAL CHALLENGES

¶3. (SBU) Ingraham acknowledged serious economic headwinds arising from a decline in investment flows as major hotel projects wind down, combined with high world energy prices, whose impact is amplified in the energy-dependent Bahamas. He pointed to the weak U.S. economy in 2007, particularly the sub-prime meltdown in the housing market, to explain lower tourism numbers. Briefly mentioning the Iraq conflict and worldwide terrorism, the Prime Minister referenced HIV-AIDS, climate change, and adjusting to international free trade agreements (with the EU in particular), among the global forces beyond the leadership's control that contributed to "a difficult year both at home and abroad".

¶4. (SBU) Charting his government's course ahead in the face of the rough seas on the horizon, the Prime Minister was confident in outlining his government's key goals for 2008. He stressed that developing a national energy policy, with attention to alternative sources and energy efficiency, would be a key priority. He also highlighted his intention to strengthen financial services, the second-biggest sector of the economy. "We are positioning ourselves to make a bid to regain a stronger position in the international insurance sector which we once dominated," he said.

¶5. (SBU) The Prime Minister focused attention on the need to improve tourism offerings, stressing the importance of new markets in Canada and Europe, especially in an unfavorable economic climate for the U.S. dollar. He pledged to adjust tourism strategies to meet evolving, global market demands such as eco-friendliness and heritage tourism. To enhance Bahamian competitiveness, he promised to overhaul Nassau's international airport and its smaller Family Island airports. Ingraham observed that The Bahamas needed to do a better job

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of "exploiting the potential for linkages between our agricultural, fisheries and light manufacturing sectors and the tourism sector." He also emphasized the need to foster local entrepreneurship in a globalized economy, reflecting a broader desire to capture more tourism-related purchases and decrease the economy's reliance on imports.

CONFRONTS KEY DOMESTIC PROBLEMS

¶6. (SBU) Turning his sights to domestic issues, Ingraham put crime at the top of his agenda, calling it "our single biggest national concern." Ingraham cautioned that "this level of violence, about which we cannot be complacent as a people, undermines the peace and tranquillity for which our country has been admired." His focus on law enforcement reflects how politically sensitive the steady drumbeat of violent crime has become (see reftel A). Ingraham is also focused on social development issues, especially given the links he sees between poor educational achievement, unemployment, and crime. To this end, he promised investments in education, health, and road-building improvements to ameliorate traffic woes.

¶7. (SBU) Tying together his themes of economic and social development with tourism, Ingraham ranked redeveloping dilapidated downtown Nassau, a cruise-ship hub and mainstay of the domestic economy, first among a number of proposed, large-scale works projects in the capital. Others included: dredging Nassau harbor to allow the most modern ocean-going ships to call in port; rationalizing cargo terminals and transfer, in part to alleviate downtown traffic congestion and pollution; construction of public buildings, such as a Magistrate's Court and Registrar General's Office; introducing a new town planning act; protecting public beach access; and re-starting the stalled low-income housing program, which was suspended due to a shortfall in funding in ¶2007.

18. (SBU) Finally, the Prime Minister noted his government's concern for public service reform, promising to increase the quality and convenience of and customer satisfaction with the provision of government services. He has also pledged to overhaul what he termed a heavy legacy of colonial era laws still on the books to bring the country into the 21st century. He concluded reassuringly that "overall, 2008 promises to be a better year than was last year."

COMMENT

19. (SBU) The Prime Minister's address was characteristic of his pragmatic, no-nonsense style. His description of current government challenges was comprehensive and realistic, eschewing grandiose visions or targets. It was a solid rundown of his new government's early successes and a basic blueprint for his next steps, with significant nods to The Bahamas' susceptibility to the economic climate in the U.S. and beyond. The Prime Minister's most recent public statements have increased his focus on tourism and healthcare improvements, as well as legislative reforms to update colonial-era criminal laws, giving further shape to government aims in domestic policy. A staunch ally, the Ingraham government will continue to welcome practical U.S. assistance to deal with its immediate problems, and perhaps defuse some of the political pressure under which it is operating. The Bahamas embrace of the IOM Deportee Reintegration Initiative, for example, and its readiness to engage in diverse law enforcement and border security training initiatives, reflect its commitment to USG priorities. With its electoral position now secure, and the opposition disarray providing some respite (see reftel E), the FNM government is now in a position to make even more progress on its own and USG priorities in the year ahead.
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